



Capitol of Idaho

By John E. Tourtellotte, 1913¹

The progress of the world ever since the dawn of creation, has been recorded, down through the different stages of enlightenment, by man's architectural constructions.

Starting in with the crudest of shelters constructed of poles and skins; and caves dug out of banks of clay or soft stone on down through the ages until the Pyramids of Egypt, which was the man's first great architectural achievement. Later came the interior or cave-like Egyptian temples, then the temples with beautiful exteriors constructed during the more modern civilizations of Greece and Rome, continuing on down to the cathedrals of the middle ages and today the modern private and public buildings with all the conveniences of an age in which man has dominated the forces of nature, compelling them to serve him to a greater extent than has been recorded, in any period of the world's history.

Man was created in the image of his Maker and his body is the temple for the indwelling of the Creator's spirit. From the beginning man conceived of building a temple in honor of his Creator, and that inner spirit in himself which makes him an intelligent being, giving him the power to dominate the forces of nature and make them all serve him. All these great architectural constructions have various titles depending on the more or less inter-dependence of Church and State. Where Church and State are united, the buildings were usually called Temples; when built by large numbers of people with the Church in control they were usually called Cathedrals, in the more modern time at least; and when the State was in control and the Church, as such, had no voice in the matter, they were then Capitols.

Man in his attempts in building these architectural monuments, in order to obtain grand and majestic effects, obtained them to a greater extent than hitherto, when he builded [sic] the vaulted dome patterned after the canopy of Heaven. We have grand examples of this type of construction in St. Peter's Cathedral at Rome, St. Paul's Cathedral at London and our National Capitol at Washington.

The states, or unit commonwealths, comprising our great country have almost universally adopted this type of building to stand as a monument to the dignity, intelligence and moral ideals of her people and the resources of her domain.

It is significant in comparing these architectural constructions with the people of the period which they represent; how aptly they tell the story of man's state. The underground temples of Egypt were crude and uncouth on the exterior with useless and meaningless obelisks, backed up

by pylons, to designate the entrances. The interiors were dark and gloomy but were more or less laminated ornamented with colonades [sic]. The Greek and Roman civilizations placed the colonnades [sic] on the outside, the interiors being dark, superstitious and mysterious.

The Egyptian temples without thought of externals, blindly looked for and attempted the beautiful in the dim, mysterious interiors—the blind groping of the spirit of man for the Diety [sic] within. Greece idealized outer beauty and perfected the physical form and the outer in architecture. Her temples were symmetrical and beautiful in form and detail on the exterior, but were without light or interest on the interior. From that period to the present, the ideals and status of man's development is recorded in his architectural. Even fifty years ago when the wings of our National Capitol at Washington were builded [sic], men who visited it at that time spoke of the darkness and gloom of the interior and the lack of comfort on account of ineffective heating and no ventilation.

Today Idaho's central or monumental Capitol unit stands completed and the illustrations in this booklet tell the graphic story of its exterior and interior. The interior is flooded with light during the day and at night is ablaze with brilliancy without shadow or dark nooks. The building is well balanced, in that exterior and interior are equal in colonades [sic] and beauty of treatment of walls, surfaces, and openings. The building is not a cave with ornamental colonades [sic] on the interior standing in superstitious darkness and gloom; neither is it a decorative shell enclosing a gloomy unornamented interior, damp, cold and uninviting as were the Egyptian and Greek temples respectively, which truly represented the different states of minds of the people at the periods in which constructions occurred.

Examine if you please the temples and capitols of the world in modern times and ask yourself if they do not truly represent the peoples of the localities of the periods in which they were builded [sic].

Idaho conceived the idea in 1905 to build a Capitol, which should stand as a monument before the world truly representing the spirit of her commonwealth. She chose for the purpose of working out her conception a Capitol Commission of representative wise men of various occupations, who have with the cooperation of the architects, architectural draftsmen and builders, created a design and worked it out in stone with this object in view. To the Capitol Commission, which has served without compensation, much credit is due for the success of the building.

Her deep foundations rest on river gravel fifteen feet below the surface of the ground. Below ground the foundation is of concrete, broad and strong. The granite base course was shipped from Vermont and the hard, sense stone of the superstructure is from the State quarries located at Table Rock three miles east of the building site. The construction throughout is fire proof, with marble floors and side walls in the rotunda and with marble wainscoting and marble floors throughout the balance of the public space in the building. All office rooms are finished in mahogany and have rock maple floors; cornices, ceilings and decorative portions are of stucco; elevators, electrical illumination on the interior and exterior, mechanical ventilation, vacuum cleaning, heating and cooling of the building and the supplying of water under pressure from her own artesian wells, is all done by the independent power plant located three hundred feet to

the rear of the Capitol. Coal is fed into the boilers automatically and the building is cleaned by mechanical vacuum cleaners. The heating and cooling is governed automatically for man's comfort.

The atmosphere is pure, bright, healthful and is supplied mechanically. All the forces of nature are harnessed and made to serve and contribute to the welfare of man in this building. Thus relieved of the discomforts of extremes of temperature, drudgery of upkeep and with gloom and unsanitary conditions overcome, being situated among pleasant optimistic environments, man will be more efficient, resulting in better service by officials and employees and broader and wiser laws being enacted by her legislative bodies in the interest of the common good.

Idaho's Capitol on the interior is flooded with light. Its rotunda, corridors and interior as a whole is nearer perfect in this respect than any building of its kind perhaps in the world.

Does it represent the people of her commonwealth? Are the ideals of the people of Idaho morally white and pure? In the great beehive of industrial Idaho is there a greater percentage of workers and producers than elsewhere?

If the people are well balanced in their ideal and understand that a commonwealth, like the individual, to be worthwhile and endure, must have a soul; that the great white light of conscience must be allowed to shine and by its interior illumination make clear the path of duty and in the clarity of that vision that they must act and go forward with courage, to perfect the outward form by the developing and conserving of her resources; encouraging legitimate enterprise and industry, and by embracing and perfecting all that tends to the upbuilding of the moral, intellectual and physical needs of her people; if the people of Idaho hold these ideals and are striving to make them real, then this Capitol truly represents the Commonwealth of Idaho.

¹ *Tourtelotte & Hummel Architects, The Souvenir Booklet: Capitol of Idaho at Boise, (Boise: Overland Publishing Company, 1913)2.*